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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 1198

RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0195

RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY 0247

RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0168

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0600

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 002451

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SUBJECT: PREPARATIONS FOR REFUGEES & BORDER SECURITY
NEIGHBORS' WORKING GROUPS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Patricia Butenis for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C/REL ACGU) Summary: The Government of Iraq (GOI) is engaged in preparations for two of the three Neighbors' Working Group meetings which had been agreed upon at the Sharm al Sheikh conference in May. Deputy Foreign Minister Hamoud will lead the Iraqi delegation to the July 26th Refugees Working Group (RWG) in Jordan, while Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi will lead the Iraqi delegation to the Border Security Working Group (BSWG) tentatively scheduled for August 1-2 in Damascus. The RWG will provide an opportunity for Iraq to help address problems occurring in countries hosting Iraqi refugees, and the BSWG will be a forum for Iraq to seek cooperation with states that are the sources and/or transit points for the flow of foreign terrorists into Iraq. Each working group is expected to have the participation of Iraq's neighbors as well as the UN, the Arab League, and others. End Summary.

REFUGEE WORKING GROUP CHALLENGES

¶2. (C/REL ACGU) Deputy Foreign Minister Hamoud will lead a delegation of three Iraqi Ministers (Interior, Displacement and Migration, Human Rights) to the July 26th Refugees Working Group (RWG) in Jordan. According to the Iraqis, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Arab League, and the UN are expected to be participants at the RWG with the U.S., EU, Japan, and Russia being observers. The RWG is viewed as a forum for Iraq to repair strained relationships with the principal Iraqi refugee hosting countries Syria and Jordan. Both are frustrated that GOI has not yet made good on its April pledge to provide \$25 million to support Iraqi refugees in their countries and to demonstrate to its citizens and the international community that it assumes responsibility for assisting its displaced citizens abroad. The Iraqi government is insisting that it will channel its support through the Iraqi Red Crescent despite concerns in Jordan and Syria.

¶3. (C/REL ACGU) Comment: Post understands from Embassy Amman that Jordan will not accept the Iraqi plan to utilize the Iraqi Red Crescent, and there needs to be some creative thinking about how to bridge the two governments' positions. (Post does not yet know the Syrian Government's reaction to the Iraqi support plan.) From our vantage point in Baghdad, failure to find an agreement between Iraq, Jordan and Syria could lead the latter two countries to increase entry restrictions for Iraqis fleeing violence and to reduce essential services for Iraqi refugees. The failure of GOI to find an acceptable mechanism to channel its funds to

neighboring countries would also have a negative impact on potential new donors in the region. It could also prevent UNHCR and UNICEF from fully implementing their planned expansion of educational programs geared to dramatically increasing the number of Iraqi children's participation in formal education in Syria and Jordan.

ZEBARI ON REGIONAL TALKS

¶4. (C/REL ACGU) In a July 22 meeting with the Ambassador, Iraqi FM Zebari stated that he had talked earlier that day to Syrian FM Walid Muallem, pushing the Syrian FM to set a date for the Neighbors' Border Security Working Group meeting in Damascus. Muallem promised to finalize a date shortly. According to Zebari, Muallem also said the Syrians plan to rejoin the Energy Working Group and attend the July 26 Refugees Working Group meeting in Amman. Zebari confirmed that the U.S. could send observers to the refugees meeting in Amman "from the beginning session." The Ambassador said the U.S. would also like to send observers to Damascus. Zebari agreed to work with the Syrians on making it happen.

PREPARATIONS FOR BORDER SECURITY WORKING GROUP

¶5. (C/REL ACGU) At a July 22 meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi met with Pol-Mil Counselor Ambassador Marcie Ries and MNF-I Major General Scott to discuss Iraq's desire for U.S. help to prepare the Iraqi delegation for the upcoming Border Security Working Group (BSWG). Post expects the BSWG to convene in Damascus on August 1-2. Abbawi mentioned that bilateral meetings between the Syrians and the GOI might take

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place immediately following the working group. Abbawi explained that the GOI's strategy is not merely to confront those causing problems, but rather to persuade all participants to cooperate on solutions which will help each of them, since all are vulnerable to terrorism. He requested a briefing that would contain as much specific information as possible regarding Syrian and Iranian facilitation of foreign terrorists. Abbawi volunteered that the GOI was seeking observer status for the U.S. at the working group. His feeling was that the Syrians would not object but that the Iranians might.

¶6. (C/REL ACGU) Abbawi began the meeting by declaring that this working group was the most sensitive of the three which had been agreed upon at the Sharm al Sheikh conference in May. He explained that the GOI would seek to build cooperation and convince neighbors to help Iraq while at the same time helping themselves, since terror is not a threat limited to Iraq. In order to do this, he continued, Iraq was thinking about how it could lay out convincing evidence concerning Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, or Iraq could provide a limited amount of evidence while protecting sensitive information. Iraq wanted the working group to consider every means that could be used to combat terrorism, including border security, financial measures, use of the media, and even fighting drug trafficking which supported terror. After considering all of these facets, he hoped that the working group would reach some concrete conclusions. He explained that top GOI security and intelligence officials were working on a detailed report on border-related issues in order to prepare Iraq's delegation. As an aside, Abbawi indicated that he had sought information from the UK Embassy regarding Iranian activities on Iraq's border, but had yet to hear a reply.

¶7. (C/REL ACGU) When asked, Abbawi opined that bilateral GOI-SARG meetings would have to take place following the working group, although he would have preferred that they happen before. He expects that the GOI delegation would include top security and intelligence officials and that it would meet with the Syrians immediately after the working

group. Dates for the working group had not yet been confirmed by Damascus, but August 1-2 had been mentioned, he said.

¶18. (C/REL ACGU) Ambassador Ries offered to have MNF-I's intelligence chief, BG Laquement, provide a briefing to the GOI delegation at some time before they depart for Damascus. DFM Abbawi readily agreed, acknowledging the desirability of combining the Coalition's information with that of the GOI. MG Scott outlined the scope of the problem of foreign terrorists in Iraq, highlighting MNF-I's estimate that 90% of suicide bombings in Iraq are carried out by foreigners, and that 70% of these pass through Syria, although they come from throughout the Middle East. He concluded by discussing some of the implications and consequences of the foreign terrorist problem.

¶19. (C/REL ACGU) DFM Abbawi expressed satisfaction with the assistance that the USG was offering in preparation for the working group and emphasized that he wanted evidence regarding not only Syria, but also Iran and others. He indicated that evidence about Iran's activities would be particularly important.

¶10. (C/REL ACGU) Abbawi did not think that the SARG would object to observer status for the U.S. at the working group, but the Iranians might. Abbawi thought it would be valuable to have a USG representative on hand who could "clarify things." Ambassador Ries inquired as to whether the GOI was considering other international approaches to the problem of foreign terrorists at the UN or other fora, for example. Abbawi indicated that both UN and Arab League representatives would be present at the upcoming working group. He explained that the results, or lack thereof, of all of the working groups would be reported to the next ministerial, which he believed would have the same broad international participation, including the P5, G8, and Arab League, among others.

¶11. (C/REL ACGU) According to Abbawi, the GOI considered a "sub-commission" which would look at specific actions and resources needed for border control as a possible deliverable from the Border Security Working Group. This sub-commission might expand to include EU representatives, opined Abbawi,

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and could address requests such as the recurrent Syrian plea for night-vision goggles to aid them in controlling their border with Iraq. Such a meeting might be convened in Amman in September. (Note: DHS Attach has already been working with the GOI on just such a regional experts-level conference to follow-up on one conducted in June in Aqaba. Syria did not participate in the Aqaba conference. End Note.)

¶12. (C/REL ACGU) At the conclusion of the meeting, Abbawi related that he "didn't expect the Syrians to actually do anything." For Syria, everything is about regime survival, he continued, and they believe that the U.S. strategy is failing, that the U.S. will leave Iraq, and that Syria will be seen as a hero for helping to save their Arab brothers. Abbawi noted that Bashar al-Assad was feeling pressure due to its isolation, and that Syria saw Iran as its only friend in the region.

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